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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000555

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR H, DRL/IRF, EAP/BCLTV, AND DRL

H PLEASE PASS TO OFFICE OF SENATOR BROWNBACK

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM KIRF PREL OREP VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: OPEN 2003 LETTER FROM FATHER LY TO US CONGRESS

Ref: A: Hanoi 155 B: Hanoi 59 C. 03 Hanoi 1821

¶1. (U) In a January 8 meeting in Hanoi, Vice Minister of Public Security Le Van Huong gave Senator Samuel Brownback a copy of an open letter in Vietnamese to the US Congress dated June 27, 2003 by imprisoned Catholic Priest Nguyen Van Ly (Ref A). The letter, the text of which follows in para 3, is similar in content to Ly's comments during his meeting with Senator Brownback (Ref B). In it, Ly criticized Congressional bills condemning Vietnam on grounds of human rights and religious freedom, and asserted that freedoms of speech and thought do exist in Vietnam and that the Government does not repress religion. He invited Members of Congress to visit and "meet with anyone you want" in order to authenticate these claims. Father Ly noted his own conviction, but made no further comments his own case, nor any admission or denial of guilt.

¶2. (SBU) Comment: Given Father Ly's many years of outspoken criticism of the Government of Vietnam, this letter more likely reflected the exigencies of prison existence rather than his personal views on individual rights in Vietnam. Indeed, the text sticks closely to the standard GVN claims of personal freedoms -- tempered by the needs of national security -- repeated frequently in newspapers, speeches, and meetings. This letter may well have been an explicit or implicit prerequisite to the cut in Father Ly's sentence by five years in July 2003 (ref c). End Comment

¶3. Begin text (unofficial Embassy translation)

Petition to the Two Houses of the US Congress

Vietnam, June 27, 2003

The Speakers of the Houses,
Senators and Representatives,

May God protect and let the American people live in peace
and happiness.

I am Theodore Nguyen Van Ly. Before I was arrested on May 17, 2003, I was the priest in charge of An Truyen Parish in Hue Diocese of the Catholic Church of Vietnam. I was invited by the US Government and Congress to speak on religious freedom in Vietnam on February 13 and May 16, 2001, in Washington D.C. I was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for the charge of "acting against an order of probation and sabotaging the national unity," and have been serving my term in a prison in accordance with the current law of Vietnam. Through the media, I know that the Houses of the US Congress are going to pass the Vietnam Human Rights Act and therefore I would like respectfully to send this petition to you.

I would like sincerely to thank those who have kindly paid attention to the religious situation in Vietnam and to me personally. But for the long-term interests of the two countries and especially for the sake of national sovereignty of my country, I find myself obliged to make this petition, without being influenced by any outside pressure, to request the Houses of the US Congress to cancel the Vietnam Human Rights Act and the Bill on Religious Freedom in Vietnam for the following reasons:

¶1. The parliament of one country should not and does not have the right to pass a bill on another country because it infringes the right to equality of the other country. The passing of a bill on another country by the US Congress may be interpreted as that somebody in the US Congress wanted to take advantage of the issue of human rights for unhealthy purposes. Perhaps the US Congress is the only Parliament that dares inconsiderately to pass bills on other countries. Any matter of mutual concern should be much better and more efficiently settled through dialogues and diplomatic channels.

¶2. Vietnam has simultaneously achieved four essential successes that many other countries have not, i.e. independence and unity, social justice for every of its 54

ethnic groups, not being enslaved by or dependent on foreign power, and being one of the most secure and stable countries in the world. These four successes themselves are enough to ensure Vietnam's prestige in the international community. These four very difficult goals have been very well attained by Vietnam. Economic development and loosening of control over people's legitimate rights to freedom in harmony with the security conditions of the country are two easier goals that are naturally essential and the State of Vietnam has been carrying out various reforms in order to achieve these two goals in a more and more efficient and practical manner, day by day and in all fields, especially with respect to human rights and religious issues.

13. If one looks at Vietnam's ethical, cultural, and socialist ideological bases, there are now both freedom of speech and freedom of thought in Vietnam. Presently all of the nearly 600 newspapers in Vietnam are using these bases in making critical remarks and comments on various issues. In the international market economy into which Vietnam is trying to integrate, these two freedoms are naturally more adequate and practicable. But as priorities are given to the national security and people's conduct, like many other countries, Vietnam needs to impose restrictions on certain adversely loose freedoms that may cause disturbances to the country.

14. The State of Vietnam does not repress religions. Only some restrictions set by Vietnam are not satisfactory to certain people, but the Resolution of the 7th Plenum of the CPV Central Committee provided that "religions have been and will be in existence together with the nation in the process of socialist construction in Vietnam," and pointed out directions satisfactorily to address the issues of religious freedom for the six formally-recognized religions in Vietnam. In my opinion, these six religions are all pleased with this major and positive fact and any minor point that they may still find unsatisfactory shall be easily agreed upon in a reasonable manner and in harmony with the overall interests of the nation. Specifically, the Catholic Church of Vietnam is now permitted to conduct broader selection and training of priests, that is to say that directions for smooth and definite resolution of this most crucial and burning issue have been given.

15. You are respectfully invited to visit Vietnam to see with your own eyes how positively Vietnam is changing and directly meet with anyone you want to. It is certain that such a visit shall authenticate what I am writing above.

I pray night and day for the US President, US Congress, and the American people to live in ever-increasing peace, moral values, and happiness in the family of brotherly humanity. Please also pray for my Vietnamese homeland and for me.

Thank you very much indeed for your kind reading of this petition and I hope you share my legitimate view. Please accept my respectful compliments.

Sincerely,

Prisoner Theodore Nguyen Van Ly
(Priest of Hue Diocese)
end text
BURGHARDT